

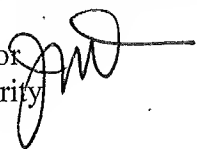


FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY



M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Tom Biesiadny, Director
Fairfax County Department of Transportation

FROM: John W. Dargle, Jr., Director
Fairfax County Park Authority 

DATE: May 31, 2012

SUBJECT: Operational Analysis of Dulles Toll Road Ramps to Tysons

I appreciate the time taken last Wednesday, May 23, 2012 by members of your staff (Sayed Nabavi, Jeffrey Hermann and Eric Teitelman), along with the consultant, Tim Ramey, to meet with me, members of my staff and Park Board members Bill Bouie and Ken Quincy, who represent the Tysons Corner districts. That meeting provided us with a good overview of the Dulles Toll Road Ramp Study and the various options under consideration. Your staff was patient and helpful in answering our questions, in particular about the proposed Option 3 Dulles Toll Road entrance/exit ramp through Old Courthouse Spring Branch Stream Valley Park and Ash Grove Historic Site.

The transportation needs of Tysons Corner are great and will continue to grow as sites throughout Tysons transform into mixed-use urban developments. I understand the challenges presented by redesigning the road system around existing and planned development. By County policy, the Park Authority is obliged to prevent or mitigate any impacts to natural and cultural resources on parkland and we generally discourage road projects on our parkland. Therefore, I am providing this memo with Park Authority staff's preliminary review and analysis of potential impacts that you may incorporate into your evaluation of the pros and cons of each of the options under study.

All of the road and ramp alignments considered in the study would have some impact on public parkland and Chesapeake Bay Resource Protection Area (RPA) land. The Option 3 ramp connecting the Boone Boulevard Extension to the Dulles Toll Road would have the greatest impacts to natural and cultural resources on parkland and would have an impact on the recreational use of parkland as well. If any land disturbing activities are to occur on park property, a request for a permit and/or easement request from the Park Authority is required. Additionally due to the anticipated impacts to parkland and the potential source of funding a 4(f) review as well as a Section 106 review and other federal and state environmental reviews may be required. Potential impacts include the following:

Natural Resources Impacts

- The proposed road construction would effectively impact the entire Old Courthouse Spring Branch stream valley. The roadway section would have to be elevated and separated from the adjacent homes to the greatest extent possible. This would require pushing the roadway into the stream valley, and would necessitate a great deal of clearing, fill and grading outside of the road footprint. The effect of this would likely be the most dramatic within the Ash Grove Property as the road section approaches the Toll Road and must be elevated to achieve necessary grade separation. In addition to significant impacts to parkland, the grading and filling requirements of this road section would likely raise the floodplain elevation for Old Courthouse Spring Branch, which could violate state and federal “no-rise” regulations.
- The parkland that would be impacted is some of the only remaining open space and wildlife habitat in the area. The bottomland habitat along Old Courthouse Spring Branch and the hillside leading up to Ash Grove, while impacted from previous human disturbance, contains a mature forest stand and many good-quality understory and herbaceous species such as ferns and cardinal flower. The stream valley corridor provides many valuable natural resource services as well as providing water quality benefits and quality of life benefits for the local residents.
- There is one state record of a rare invertebrate species possibly being on the property which would be impacted by the project. If this species were present, the proposed project would wipe out the suitable habitat with no opportunity to conduct on-site mitigation. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Natural Heritage Program must be consulted to determine what action is necessary to determine potential occurrence of the species, potential impacts and potential solutions. Since the subject property is parkland, the Park Authority must be consulted and involved in this process.
- The entire road section on parkland would lie within the Chesapeake Bay Resource Protection Area (RPA). The presence of the roadway with significant fill within the floodplain would not only have direct impacts on vegetation and wildlife, but would also alter the floodplain function by reducing the floodplain footprint. This restriction would increase flooding up and down the stream with possible significant erosive effects on the stream channel itself.
- A significant portion of the proposed road alignment in Old Courthouse Spring Branch Stream Valley Park runs directly on top of the existing county sanitary sewer line. This alignment would likely require relocation of the sanitary sewer further onto parkland, again increasing disturbance and fragmentation and the overall impacts to the park.
- The proposed road alignment would directly impact wetlands on the Ash Grove Historic Site. These wetlands are in the form of vernal pools and old pond structures in the floodplain that provide breeding habitat for a significant number of amphibians to include frogs and toads and likely salamanders. The road section would destroy this amphibian breeding habitat in the wetlands, and would destroy adjacent terrestrial habitat necessary for the adult phases for these same species. Some of those areas not directly impacted by construction would be cut off from access to the remaining wetlands for breeding. The populations here are likely already at minimal levels to maintain viability, and this highly disruptive project would probably eliminate some species and greatly reduce the populations of other species.

- The proposed road alignment goes right through a stormwater management pond on parkland at the end of Northern Neck Drive and adjacent to the old Ash Grove Lane on Ash Grove Historic Site. This pond was constructed as part of the adjacent townhouse subdivision. No maintenance agreement for this pond was recorded with the DPWES Maintenance and Stormwater Management Division. Currently, the maintenance status of this pond is unclear, but the pond itself serves an important function in treating water coming off of the impervious surfaces in the subdivision. This pond would need to be reconstructed at another location if displaced by the road. In addition, stormwater management facilities would need to be constructed to detain and treat water coming off of the new road section. The only available location for such ponds is on parkland. Construction of ponds on parkland would be important to protect water quality and stream health, but would result in further destruction and permanent conversion of parkland to maintained infrastructure.
- If Federal funds will be used for this project, the Park Authority requests that all Federal regulations for environmental impact assessment be adhered to.
- The proposed project would essentially remove a stream valley system in one of the most developed areas of Fairfax County. To offset this impact, the Park Authority requests that the Toll Road Ramp project acquire and improve replacement stream valley property in the same watershed to directly mitigate all wetland, stream, RPA, and parkland acreage impacts.

Cultural Resources Impacts

- The proposed alternative including highway construction, staging areas, sewer relocation area, stormwater management pond relocation area, and the massive grading that will be required for this project has the potential to cause adverse effects to archaeological resources that are eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, there is high potential for the presence of prehistoric and historical archaeological sites in areas that have not been previously subject to archaeological testing. Sites that may be affected are known and predicted prehistoric archaeological resources dating to the Late Archaic through Late Woodland periods, archaeological resources associated with former outbuildings and activity areas associated with Ash Grove; archaeological resources associated with the Fairfax family hunting lodge on this parkland (which dates to 1740 or earlier); and other known and predicted archaeological resources.
- The project would be subject to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, thus VDOT would be required to coordinate with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Park Authority would be a consulting party for this undertaking. The Park Authority would request that VDOT archaeologists and archaeological consultants coordinate with the Cultural Resource Management and Protection Section (CRMP) to ensure that archaeological testing is conducted at intervals sufficient to discover sites predicted to be present in the proposed impact areas.
- Ash Grove was partially burned. The original core, dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is still present. Those damaged sections of the building were reconstructed on the basis of Historic American Buildings Survey measured drawings and documentation. The building may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places and should be evaluated as such. If the building is eligible, visual effects and

effects to the building from noise and vibration must be taken into consideration. In addition to the effects to associated archaeological resources, effects to the cultural landscape must be considered. The Park Authority would request that the building and landscape be evaluated.

Recreational Impacts

- The "Conceptual Parks and Open Space Network Map" (Map 9) on page 79 of the Tysons Corner Comprehensive Plan identifies the Old Courthouse Spring Branch stream valley as the location for multipurpose pedestrian/bicycle trails that would follow along the stream length as well as provide bridge crossings, connecting Tysons with the low-density residential neighborhoods outside of Tysons Corner. Construction of a highway ramp to the Dulles Toll Road through the stream valley would limit the extent of the lengthwise trail and may completely block access to a key through trail at Ashgrove Lane.
- The Tysons Plan states (on p. 78) that "These stream valley parks can...serve as major linear urban parks and support the planned trail system with a variety of natural landscapes. These parks will provide a variety of passive outdoor leisure experiences for residents, visitors and workers in Tysons, including outdoor exercise and enjoyment of quiet natural spaces." Noise and vibrations from a Toll Road ramp through parkland would diminish the park user experience in one of the very few places in Tysons Corner that has the potential to provide enjoyment of quiet natural spaces.

In summary, this proposed road project would have significant permanent impacts on the natural and cultural resources in Old Courthouse Spring Branch Stream Valley Park and Ash Grove Historic Site and would eliminate passive recreational opportunities in these parks. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed project. If you have questions or need further assistance, you may contact me at 703-324-8584 or Andi Dorlester in the Park Planning office at 703-324-8692 or via email at Andrea.Dorlester@fairfaxcounty.gov.

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